



Idaho IBA News

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All About the Weather...

Colleen Moulton, Idaho IBA Coordinator

Maybe it's another sign of climate change, maybe it's not, but the past 6 months seem to have been full of surprises here in Idaho. First we had a really late spring, with snow on the ground well into May, and even early June. A fairly mild summer ensued—quite surprising considering how hot summers have been lately. Now here we are in “fall”, and at first I thought someone forgot to remind Mother Nature to turn the thermostat back down. It was October 1st and here in Boise we hit 91 degrees! But then, just over a week later we had snow—the earliest snow every recorded in the valley. So what's in store for us this winter is anyone's guess. But one thing is for sure, this is bound to keep the



Sunrise at Blackfoot Reservoir IBA
Photo by Jennifer Jackson

weather forecasters on their toes!

Even with all the strange weather, there was a lot going on this spring and summer at IBAs around the state. Read all about it inside, and have a great winter...whatever it shall bring.

See you in the spring!!

IBA Status Updates

Since the Spring newsletter, one IBA has been updated and expanded, while 5 others have been submitted to National Audubon for Global review.

Thanks to the hard work of the folks at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), the Deer Flat IBA has been expanded to include not just Lake Lowell (which were the boundaries before), but the surrounding uplands and the islands along 113 miles of the Snake River. This expansion includes waterbird colonies along the river, and waterfowl nesting habitat.

The National Audubon IBA Review Committee is currently taking a look at 5 of Idaho's IBAs for classification as Global IBAs. As you may recall, last spring 4 IBAs were designated as having Global significance. The IBAs looking to join this group are: South Hills, Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, Idaho National Laboratory, and Owyhee Uplands. In the next few months we should know if these incredible places have joined those IBAs that are identified as important on a global scale.

Spring IBA Monitoring



Setting up quadrat survey at Market Lake WMA/IBA

Find information on Idaho's IBAs, the Idaho Birding Trail, and more at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>

Measuring a newly banded ibis at Oxford Slough WPA/ IBA



Spring seemed to really drag its feet this year. Although our Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey (IBIS) program was all geared up and ready to start counting birds in mid-April, we couldn't even get to many study locations because they were still under several feet of snow! Luckily, snow and ice also meant the birds weren't back yet either. After some scrambling to come up with things to do, and a bit of thumb twiddling, spring finally arrived.

This year we began surveying a handful of IBAs that we hadn't visited before, such as Sand Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Heyburn State Park. During the month of May we conducted aquatic bird surveys and secretive marsh bird surveys to begin inventory of these new sites. Then we moved on to studying White-faced Ibis and Franklin's Gull colonies at several IBAs in eastern Idaho, including Market Lake WMA. Because these colonies are nestled within dense cattail and bulrush marshes, they are very difficult to survey. So we spent the month of June testing various protocols, and deciding on a modified quadrat technique to be used in future surveys.

The season finished up in July with ibis and pelican banding (see below). Not a bad way to spend a few months! Keep your eyes peeled for the results of this year's field season on the IDFG website.

Ibis and Pelican Banding

This year we continued two banding projects initiated in 2007 on IBAs in eastern Idaho. Starting in early July, 475 White-faced Ibis and 600 American White Pelicans were banded with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service bands and marked with either colored leg bands or wing tags that denoted which colony they came from.

The main goals of both projects are to determine where these birds go to forage, where they go during migration/winter, and how much movement there is between colonies.

White-faced Ibis were marked at 4 IBAs, including Market Lake WMA, Mud Lake WMA, Bear Lake NWR, and Oxford Slough WPA. Each bird received a colored leg

band (e.g., green for Bear Lake) with a unique alphanumeric code (e.g., T01).

Pelicans were marked with colored patagial (wing) tags at 2 IBAs: Blackfoot Reservoir (black tags) and Minidoka NWR (red tags). Similar to the ibis, pelican tags also have unique codes (all numbers this time) that identify the individual bird.

If you see any of these banded birds, please contact me at: (cmoulton@idfg.idaho.gov; 208-287-2751). Please make note of the date, location, band/tag color, and band/tag number if possible. **Thank you!!**



A marked pelican at Blackfoot Reservoir IBA

Fire at Silver Creek

By Dayna Smith, Silver Creek Preserve Manager

On August 27th, a fire burned nearly 14,000 acres of prime sagebrush habitat in central Idaho, including part



Fire burning at Silver Creek

of The Nature Conservancy's Silver Creek Preserve. What are the ramifications for the preserve and surrounding public lands? The answer will form the latest chapter in the

Conservancy's 30 years of conservation, restoration and stewardship at the preserve. Silver Creek is one of the best examples of a high desert, cold spring ecosystem in the western United States. The water conditions nourish an abundance of insects, which in turn support an exceptionally high density of brown and rainbow trout (approximately 6,000 trout per stream mile), and more than 150 species of birds. More than 7,000 people from around the world visit Silver Creek Preserve each year--- to fish, paint, photograph, hike, and bird watch.



Burnt sagebrush habitat at Silver Creek

The fire started near the preserve and quickly spread southeast. At one point it headed north, jumping the southern border of the Preserve and burning about twenty acres there. The fire at this point was very hot and moving quickly. The 'old growth' sagebrush famous in this area (often times higher than the top of your head) burned to the ground. The water birch along Silver Creek also burned, leaving a relatively barren riparian area. The fire continued southeast and when it was finally controlled a few days later, it burned around 14,000 acres of prime Sage-grouse and upland sagebrush habitat.

Silver Creek's unique combination of shrub land, riparian forest and wetlands makes the Preserve and surrounding area a haven for wildlife. Utilizing a long-term ecology protection and restoration plan, The Nature Conservancy

performs extensive habitat monitoring and restoration work both on the Preserve and on 9500 acres protected by conservation easement in the watershed. The Nature Conservancy's restoration goal of the burned area is to 'help it along' and create an even more robust and diverse plant community.

The largest threats to the system in the fire's aftermath are erosion and noxious weeds. In order to control weeds, we will spray weeds as they appear. Luckily, weeds tend to establish quickly and because there is currently no over-story, we can easily spot spray the weeds before they establish. Erosion will be more of a challenge as the hillsides adjacent to the Preserve have no vegetative cover and spring runoff will likely wash soil downstream and possibly into the creek. We are working with Bureau of Land Management to install erosion control structures to slow runoff.

Many of the important bunch grasses are already re-growing, even though it has been only six weeks since the fire. We are also going to seed the area with a variety of forbs (a great food source for birds), grasses, and shrubs this fall with the goal of helping a robust vegetative community establish. In addition, next spring we will plant shrubs in the riparian

area for both habitat and protection from wind-born sediment. Fires can be rejuvenating and we hope that in a few years this habitat will support an even wider range of birds, insects, plants, and animals.

Photos provided by Dayna Smith.

Silver Creek after the fire



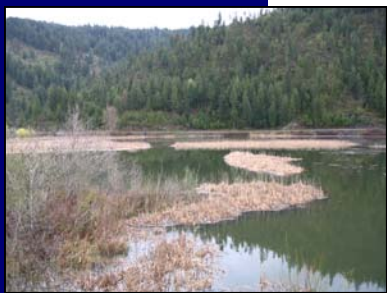
Birding at Blue Creek Bay

By Kris Buchler, Coeur d'Alene Audubon Society



Helping with the count

"If we are lucky, we'll have a Common Loon in the Bay, as they stop on Lake Coeur d'Alene during both spring and fall migrations."



Blue Creek Bay

It is 6:00 am when fellow Auduboner Lisa Hardy and I meet just north of Blue Creek Bay along Yellowstone Trail. We are there to begin our monthly bird monitoring of the Wolf Lodge Bay IBA, which includes six plots of various habitats. Four of these are in the Blue Creek Bay area. We have done this for over four years since Scott Robinson, a wildlife biologist for the BLM, nominated it as an IBA.

Our first stop is the ponderosa pine forest where we will spend our usual 20 minutes watching, listening, and recording all species seen and heard. We are greeted by the trill of the Spotted Towhee, a Song Sparrow, and the chattering of Black-capped Chickadees. As we follow the horse trail up the hill, we hear the "peek" of a Hairy Woodpecker, one of the many nesting species that use the numerous snags on this slope. Soon we hear the buzz of a Western Wood Pewee, then the chitter of Pygmy Nuthatches. Many of these species are our usual residents, but there are always surprises such as warblers that move through, hawks, or other woodpeckers.

The meadow north of the bay is our next stop. The willows along the meadow shelter Willow Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, and a "mewing" Gray Catbird. Perched in the cottonwoods are Black-billed Magpies, Northern Flicker and several Cedar Waxwings. Steller's Jays follow us and announce our path to Song Sparrows, chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and a singing Orange-crowned Warbler. Twice we have seen an immature Bald Eagle fly north, up Blue Creek, making us wonder about his

mission. A Northern Pygmy-Owl hid in the branches of a ponderosa pine. This tiny, diurnal owl feeds on unsuspecting songbirds.

Along the bay we sometimes encounter fishermen, but we no longer do the counts on weekends when noisy campers infringe on the peaceful harmony that usually exists. Osprey and Bald Eagle are sometimes seen, but the Canada Goose seems to be the primary nester in the area. Families with young are common in late spring. Wood Ducks like the quiet, marshy areas along the northern edge where other dabblers such as Mallard, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, and Gadwall feed. Fall and winter will bring divers including Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Ring-necked Duck, Common Merganser and Red-necked, and Pied-billed Grebes. If we are lucky, we'll have a Common Loon in the Bay, as they stop on Lake Coeur d'Alene during both spring and fall migrations.

Mixed coniferous forest is our fourth habitat plot. A small game trail takes us down the slope from the road into a tangled forest. A Pileated Woodpecker announces itself, but can't drown out a very small, but loudly singing, Cassin's Vireo. Each spring we joyfully await drumming of Ruffed Grouse, equaled only by the loud rasping of a Winter Wren that is telling us we are getting too close to its nest. Once we were surprised by a group of Pine Grosbeak, a species hard to find at this elevation. On our last count, three Gray Jays silently spied on us. Winter finds bird life very sparse and we hope Chestnut-backed Chickadees and nuthatches are foraging.

Blue Creek Bay offers good birding and is listed as part of the Wolf Lodge Site on the Idaho Birding Trail. Booklets are available at IDFG, and information is available on their website - <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>.

Photos provided by Kris Buchler.

South Hills Bird Census

By Karl Ruprecht, Prairie Falcon Audubon

Fifteen of southern Idaho's best birders joined forces last June 14th to survey the expansive South Hills IBA. Stretching over 620,000 acres of remote and varied topography south of Twin Falls, the IBA presents a rather daunting bird survey challenge, and a comprehensive, single day breeding bird study like this one had likely never been attempted.



Counting in the cool morning hours
Photo by Carl Stiefel

The number and density of species found was wonderful and surprising. The South Hills, also known as the Goose Creek Range or the Minidoka district of the Sawtooth National Forest, are strategically located for high bird diversity for several reasons. It is a rather isolated sky island with an endemic subspecies of lodgepole pine that feeds an endemic bird subspecies, the South Hills type Red Crossbill. It is also geographically located at a transition zone with the Great Basin to the south, the Rocky Mountain ecosystem to the east, and the temperate Snake River Plain to the north. The hills themselves are also a mosaic of ecosystems including a huge sagebrush-steppe basin, extensive juniper areas, deep rhyolite canyons with rich riparian zones, and highlands

with subalpine fir/lodgepole pine stands intermixed with aspen.

The survey was modeled after a Christmas Bird Count protocol, the only difference being that we used the IBA boundary rather than a fifteen mile diameter circle. One-hundred and forty-two different species were found in the 24 hour count period. Highlights included Flam-mulated Owl, Clay-colored, Grasshopper, and Sage Sparrows, Northern Waterthrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Ash-throated and Least Flycatchers, and a presumed Cordil-leran Flycatcher giving the Pacific-slope Flycatcher's vocalizations. Numbers of individual species were also impressive including 65 Warbling Vireos, 62 Sage Thrashers, 231 Yellow Warblers, 215 Lazuli Buntings, and 264 Brewer's Sparrows.

Prairie Falcon Audubon Society is planning on organizing this count annually. Please contact Karl Ruprecht at ruprechtjk@hotmail.com if you would like to participate.



Tallying results at the end of the day
Photo by Justin Barrett

Stories? Pictures? Ideas?

Do you have an ongoing project at an IBA that you'd like to tell others about? Or perhaps you have some great photos of IBAs that you'd like to share? If you do, send them in to "Idaho IBA News"! We would like to keep this newsletter as interactive as possible—a forum for IBA folks to communicate with one another. If you have something to share, send it to cmoulton@idfg.idaho.gov, or the mailing address on the back page.



Eared grebe chick at Oxford Slough WPA/IBA

Idaho Master Naturalist Program

Although new to Idaho, Master Naturalist-type programs are well established in many states throughout the U.S. The Idaho Master Naturalist Program aims to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to actively work toward stewardship of Idaho's natural environment. Program chapters can be formed in any community that has a need for volunteers to help with conservation education and/or scientific data collection.

Anyone who enjoys and appreciates Idaho's outdoors can be an Idaho Master Naturalist; teachers, hunters, nature guides, farmers, retired professionals, and ...you! An Idaho Master Naturalist completes 40 hours of hands-on, experiential training about Idaho ecology, plants, animals, and natural systems. In addition, participants give 40 hours of volunteer time for certification.

Through the Idaho Master Naturalist Program participants can help with and guide conservation efforts; join a statewide network of dedicated, trained volunteers who work toward conservation; further their education and interest in nature and have an opportunity to give back to their community. If you are interested in learning more about the program or would like to learn how to start a chapter in your community, contact Sara Focht at sfocht@idfg.idaho.gov or by calling (208) 278-2906.



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 **Audubon** IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS